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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
Dana P. Jacobson, Publisher/Managing Editor
Joseph Mirando, Managing Editor
Rob Mahlert, Associate Editor

Atari Online News, Etc. Staff

Dana P. Jacobson -- Editor
Joe Mirando -- "People Are Talking"
Michael Burkley -- "Unabashed Atariophile"
Albert Dayes -- CC: Classic Chips
Rob Mahlert -- Web site

With Contributions by:

Kevin Savetz
Uwe Seimet
Martin "Nightowl" Byttebier

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A-ONE #0314 04/06/01

~ ArcView and Clicks! ~ People Are Talking! ~ Vision 4.0 Released!
~ HDDRIVER Info Moves! ~ UTSI Gets New Address! ~ AOL's IM Peaked?
~ Ashcroft Urges Caution ~ Bush Abandons E-Mail! ~ Pentium 4 To Launch
~ MS: Ban Attachments! ~ Apple: Not Our Problem ~ eBay Storefronts?

-* Downloads Surging On Napster *-
-* Americans Support Email Monitoring! *-
-* RIAA, Napster Square Off In Senate Again! *-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Even though the forecast is for more rain this weekend, the weather has finally improved somewhat. It's been a ghastly past few weeks, with the rain and snow! With daylight savings time in effect, at least the days are getting longer - a sure sign that Spring is close at hand. I've begun my annual process of planning my outdoor projects for the season! I'm really looking forward to getting outdoors and being able to shed layers of clothing to stay warm. Nothing like Spring to boost the spirit!

Before I forget, I want to make sure that I remind our readers that as of May 1, Delphi will no longer support its text-side access. This will affect many Delphi users. Firstly, it will mean that Atari users without access to Macs and PCs will no longer be able to use Delphi. There hasn't been a lot of success getting online using CAB, but it possible from what I understand. How well it works is another issue. Also lost will be Delphi members' "@delphi.com" e-mail addresses. I have to tell you, that's going to hurt. Sure, I have other e-mail accounts, but my Delphi account has been around for almost 15 years! This is going to be like losing a best friend. Those of us at A-ONE who have been using Delphi addresses will be formally changing our e-mail. For now, if you want to start updating your address books for me, send future mailings to "dpj@atarinews.org" and it will either be forwarded to another account, or our favorite webmaster (thanks Rob!) will have POP3 e-mail set up for us at atarinews.org. Lastly, our e-mail subscription will have to change. Up to now, I've been sending out uuencoded files of each week's issue through Delphi's mail system. I'd take the text, compress it with ZIP, and then uuencode it and send out. That capability will be lost. So, I still have a few options; it will depend on feedback from our readers, especially those on our subscription list, to let me know what will work best for the majority of our subscribers. I can use the PC (whaddaya gonna do!) and e-mail each week's issue as a text file attachment, or ZIP it up and send that as an attachment. I don't know which will work best for those using their Atari computers for e-mail. I also have to determine from where to send the issues. Regardless, if you're an e-mail subscriber, I need to hear from you regarding your preference. Even if you're not a subscriber, but have a recommendation, let me hear from you. In the meantime, I'll do some testing to see what works and what doesn't.

Until next time...

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ArcView v0.6 and Clicks v1.0

ArcView v0.6 and Clicks v1.0 are now also available in English.
(But the site is only in German.)

"http://philippdonze.atari.org/software/index.html"

New Web Address for HDDRIVER and DISKUS

Hello!

Please note that there is a new web address for information on HDDRIVER,
DISKUS and other software I have written for the Atari and compatibles:

"http://www.seimet.de/atari_english.html"

Best regards, Uwe

New URL for Ultimate TOS Software Index

Hello,

The UTSI (Ultimate TOS Software Index) pages has found a new home:

http://users.pandora.be/tos4ever/utsi.htm

CU
Martin

VISION 4.0c Released

From: Kevin Savetz

A new version of VISION, an image manager, has been released. It is a
bugfix release.

http://vision.atari.org

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
jmirando@portone.com

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Another hectic week has come and gone, and all I can say is thank goodness. I've got a friend who has Cystic Fibrosis. Without going into too much detail, it damages the heck out of the lungs (among other things. But, hey, I said that I wasn't going to go into detail, right?). It's something you're born with. Each parent has to have the recessive gene for the disease in order for you to actually have the disease. His parents did. For over forty years, he's "dodged the bullet" and gotten away without major health problems. That all ended last week. He got a lung infection and had to spend a week in the hospital. He was incredibly hard-headed about going to the hospital, and then about staying there. Fear can make you do stupid things. I'm constantly amazed that we've survived as a species. Although we've got the intellect to know what we SHOULD do, often times we don't. Anyway, while he was in the hospital, he said something that really made me stop and think. "Why is it," he asked, "that no matter what you plan, you never know what's going to happen?" He's getting better now. He's out of the hospital and recovering pretty well. But that one question, posed out of desperation and fear for his life, made me think about my own life. No, I don't have medical problems. As a matter of fact, I've got a damned good life. But I never would have guessed way back when I got my first 1040 that I'd end up here, in 2001, still using and enjoying Atari computers. "Heck," I thought, "things change". "This one will hold me for a couple of years, then I'll move on to whatever the new whiz-bang machine happens to be." I never thought that I'd still think so well of these machines after all this time, I never thought that I'd end up writing for STReport, having a hand in the birth and growth of A-ONE, and I certainly never thought that I'd have made so many good friends simply because of my choice of computers. If computers had never given me anything else, I'd still have scores of friends to thank them for. Remember: Computers are just a collection of circuits and memory chips. It's FRIENDS who help you keep them running! <grin>

Now let's get to the news, hints, tips, and info from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

Tony Cianfaglione asks about an oddity on his Falcon:

"Normally when you move a folder frame (with text listing) from one part of the screen to another, just the outline of the folder will move quickly and relocate in the new position. The text listing will then redraw in the new location along with frame. My Falcon is attempting to move the entire listing with all the text and framing intact and thus moves with a jutting motion. Any suggestions as to a fix?"

Derryck Croker tells Tony:

"You didn't say, but I'll bet that you're running MagiC. You can turn this effect off with one of the configuration programs for MagiC if you don't want to explore the bitmap options as per the manual."

Tony shoots that idea down:

"Just plain old Gem desktop. Tos 4? Whatever the Tos native to Falcon. I don't use alternate desktops."

Steve Sweet asks Tony:

"Are you using any software that has an option for "Outline Dragging" mis-set?"

Tony tells Steve:

"The only programs running at startup is ICD boot and a mouse accelerator. I checked every option I can find with no luck."

John Garone adds:

"[Try something] like Let m' Fly CPX!"

Tony asks John:

"Where can I get Let'em fly? Is it on an ftp site?"

John tells Tony:

"Don't know where else to get it (came on one of my Falcon language disks) but if we can be assured it is'nt commercial I'll be glad to E-mail it to you! Comes with Auto folder program and CPX (used together)."

David Bolt adds:

"It's available from ftp.funet.fi and, most likely chapelie.rma.ac.be. Here's the URL for it on funet:

<URL:ftp://ftp.funet.fi/pub/atari/sysutil/letmf120.lzh>"

Tony posts:

"It seems I had a program called Winx running at startup. Disabling it allows my folders to move quickly as outlines. I don't know what Winx does because the instructions are in German but I was able to understand a couple of words, one of which was 'redraw' and presumed it was telling my system to redraw the folders constantly while they were moving.

Thanks to all for the suggestions.

PS- By the way, LetEmFly is a confusing program which is basically a line of buttons on a bar for STinG and CAB in the upper right corner of the screen. If this is not the program then there is a mistake as such on the ftp site as this is what I downloaded and opened."

JI Logan tells Tony:

"Winx is an excellent program if you have the memory and processor. On the Hades I use Gemram which moves the OS into RAM and Winx which patches various things and allows e.g. the redraw move which you describe when the left button is used (and the outline move when the right is used), also real-time scrolling of text in windows, moving/closing non-top windows etc.

I have the same problems as you with the settings (German text) but it seems to work fine.

It probably should be in the AUTO folder. It puts move corners on some boxes (i.e. allows them to be moved as if they were windows)."

Peter West adds:

"Then I think someone has the wrong program labelled as LEF. This turned normal non-window dialogs into flying ones - i.e. they could be moved on the screen with the 'asses ear' and also had some other functions. Probably redundant now with MagiC and later TOS/AESs. The button bar is more likely to something like Dock or a variant of AppLine..."

Jos Vlietstra asks about support for his video card:

"I have a MegaSTE with a Spektrum TC1 graphic card (Wilhelm Mickroeletronik). I want to use NVDI 5.1/5.3 but I don't see my card in the NVDI list of cards. I tried ET4000 , didn't work. Is there anybody who has this card and can help me ?"

Peter Schneider tells Jos:

"Maybe I've got the same. True Color with 1 MB video RAM.
Mine is an ET-4000, and it works with NVDI.

You need NVDI.PRG and NVDIVGA.INF in the AUTO folder and the whole NVDI stuff anywhere.

NVDIVGA.INF may be prepared by VMG4000 (video mode generator for ET-4000) that comes with NVDI. But be careful not to install modes your monitor can't bear!!!

And do not mix up the original Wilhelm drivers and NVDI! Either original or NVDI!

If I'm able to help you, I'll do so, but I don't know if there's any major difference between your STE an my TT. I hope there's none. At least concerning this point."

Phil Smith asks for help with his favorite database program:

"I'm attempting to run Superbase Professional on a 4 meg Atari 1040ST with TOS 1.04 and I'm experiencing something really weird. Every time I open the program editor, it acts like the '-' key is stuck and starts printing dashes continuously across the screen. This is the only program I have that does this so I don't think its a problem with my keyboard. Anyone have ideas/solutions to this problem?"

Lyndon Amsdon tells Phil to...

"Boot up with a clean system. Run it and if it still does it tell me if it makes the keyboard click noise, you know, the annoying one. Report back."

Phil tells Lyndon:

"I booted with the Superbase system disk and it worked just fine. This is really weird. By the way, probably should've mentioned that I'm trying to run Superbase off an Atari SH204 hard disk."

Jeff Armstrong asks for help setting up MiNTnet:

"Hey everyone! I'm trying to set up MintNet on my TT. But I'm a little confused. I want to boot directly into AES4.1, which the computer does now. But In order to use all that good stuff like MintNet, init.prg must be run. It's been my experience that if a GEM= line is specified in the mint.cnf file, it ignores the INIT= and doesn't run init.prg. Now how can I set up my system to get init to run before booting into GEM? I've looked at the problem a little bit and decided that I need help!"

Jo Even Skarstein tells Jeff:

"No, you don't need init.prg to do any of this, unless you want to use the multiuser-facilities.

If you really want to do this (run init.prg), you must run init.prg and comment out the "GEM="-line. The AES must then be run by init.prg. If you're not sure how this work, you can take a look at my (now rather outdated) N.AES-page at http://atari.nvg.org/n.aes/, this might give you some hints.

If you only want MiNT-Net though, you should try Marc-Anton Kehr's "MiNT-Net for lamers", or for an even simpler (but a bit more limited) solution try the beta-version of my own FMKS which you can find at http://atari.nvg.org/fmks/. There are also links to Kehr's distribution, so you can check out both.

Personally I've been using FMKS for a few weeks now, and I haven't had any problems with it so far. It's also very easy to remove if you don't like it, so IMO it's worth a try."

While on the subject of MiNT, Carl Rowlands posts:

"When I connect to Demon using MinTNet 2.0.0 I get
demuxprotrej:: Unrecognised Protocol - Reject for protocol 0xff
Demon then send a hangup signal , stopping the LCP.
Can anyone help me sort this out please?"

Martin Byttebier tells Carl:

"Add a line like this in \etc\ppp\options noauth

This should do."

Carl tells Martin:

"Thanks for that, but I now get an error "Command not recognized."
I think I may have to do something else."

Martin replies:

"Oops I replied too quickly. I notice you're using pppd 2.0.0. The noauth command doesn't work with this version.

Furthermore the warning you got isn't caused by not having noauth.
I should say to grab a newer pppd. As far as I know, the latest one is

pppd 2.3.11. With this version you must add noauth."

Well folks, that’s it for this time around. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week’s Gaming Section - Xbox Launch On Target! ’4 X 4 EVO’!
’Atlantis: The Lost Empire’!
Ashcroft Advises Video Game Caution!
And more!

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->A-ONE’s Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

Take-Two Interactive Software, Inc.
Ships 4X4 EVO for the PlayStation 2

Take-Two Interactive Software announced that its GodGames videogame publishing subsidiary shipped 4x4 EVO for the PlayStation2.

4x4 EVO, which was developed by Terminal Reality, arrived in stores nationwide on April 3rd.

‘‘4x4 EVO is a dynamic simulation racer that will allow gamers to take the off-road ride of their lives," said Kelly Sumner, Chief Executive Officer of Take-Two Interactive. ‘‘We are thrilled to add to our already very successful product line in the racing genre with such an incredible, ultra-realistic game from GodGames and Terminal Reality that fully exploits the power and technology of the Playstation2."

‘‘The PlayStation2 version of 4x4 EVO will give even more gamers the opportunity to experience the real-world physics, rugged racing style, licensed vehicles, new enhancements and blazing speed of this ultra-realistic console game," said Mike Wilson, CEO of GodGames.

4x4 EVO for Playstation2 will hit the road with a truckload of new features including, revamped vehicle physics for even more realistic driving, controls that utilize Sony’s pressure-sensitive analog buttons, and improved graphics. In addition, 4x4 EVO for PlayStation2 will showcase three new vehicles, Jeep Grand Cherokee Limited 2WD, Jeep Grand Cherokee Limited 4WD and a Jeep Grand Cherokee Race SUV.

THQ Brings ‘‘Disney’s Atlantis: the Lost Empire" to Game Boy Advance and Game Boy Color Systems

THQ Inc. announced an agreement with Disney Interactive to publish ‘‘Disney’s Atlantis: The Lost Empire" for Nintendo’s highly anticipated Game Boy Advance and existing Game Boy Color handheld systems.

Based on Disney’s upcoming animated feature film, ‘‘Atlantis: The Lost Empire," THQ expects to release the title nationwide for Game Boy Color in summer 2001 and Game Boy Advance in winter 2001.

‘‘Given Disney’s unparalleled ability to create long-standing animated motion picture classics, THQ is thrilled to bring another Disney property to life for children and parents to enjoy on Nintendo’s handheld systems," said Alison Locke, executive vice president, North American publishing, THQ. ‘‘Adding highly anticipated properties like ’Disney’s Atlantis: The Lost Empire’ to our extensive Game Boy Color and Game Boy Advance library of products helps strengthen our leadership position in handheld gaming."

‘‘Disney’s Atlantis: The Lost Empire" for Game Boy Color allows players to relive the epic adventure of the animated film as they journey to find the lost city of Atlantis. As Milo, Audrey, Vinny or Moliere, players fend off enemies and overcome dangerous obstacles in their adventure to Atlantis. Developed by Eurocom, ‘‘Disney’s Atlantis: The Lost Empire" for Game Boy Color features 14 levels of gameplay, bonus mini-games and puzzles.

Developed by 3d6, ‘‘Disney’s Atlantis: The Lost Empire" for Game Boy Advance engages players as they battle through Atlantis in their attempt to rescue the city from its feared demise. As Milo, the hero from the anticipated animated motion picture, players are challenged in more than 15 levels of gameplay that include familiar environments and characters from the movie.

Acclaim Acquires Rights to Crazy Taxi for Playstation2 Computer Entertainment System

Building on the success of its recent quarter, Acclaim Entertainment, Inc. announced that it has acquired the rights to Crazy Taxi for the PlayStation2 computer entertainment system.

Already a tremendous success on the Sega Dreamcast where it has achieved sales in excess of $30 million dollars, Crazy Taxi for the PlayStation2 computer entertainment system is scheduled to ship worldwide next month.

‘‘Crazy Taxi exemplifies our continued focus towards publishing captivating interactive content that appeals to a wide audience," said Evan Stein, vice president of Brand/Marketing. ‘‘As such, we are excited to be bringing such a high-caliber game as Crazy Taxi to the PlayStation2 computer entertainment system."

Crazy Taxi is a mad race against the clock -- and traffic. As any of four fearless cabbies, players are driven by a single goal: to rack up the mega-bucks in fares and tips before their shift ends. Drivers pick up passengers and take them to their destination by any way possible. It’s a comic cab opera of collisions and decisions where courtesy takes a back

seat to coin.

Crazy Taxi will retain all the enthralling features that made it a must-play game, including:

* Four different cabs and drivers, each with their own style and attitude;
* Two expansive, interactive courses for extensive game play;
* Nine mini-games to challenge various driving skills;
* True driving dynamics;
* Wild, mission-based game play infused with humor;
* Rockin' soundtrack by hit bands Offspring and Bad Religion.

Optimized by Acclaim Studios Cheltenham, Crazy Taxi is shipping this month at an expected retail price of $49.99.

Microsoft Says Xbox Launch, Development on Target

Microsoft said on Wednesday that its Xbox video game console is on target for a fall release and that the software giant's support for developers making games for the highly anticipated machine is also ''right on track."

''We are still right on track to deliver hardware and software for a launch in fall of 2001," Microsoft's director of games marketing, John O'Rourke, said in an e-mailed statement.

Progress on the Xbox was called into question on Wednesday after an article in the Financial Times said Microsoft was late in shipping the latest version of the software development kits used by game companies to make games.

The report in the British newspaper hit shares in video game companies, sending No. 1 games publisher Electronic Arts down nearly 9 percent to $48-3/8. The stock recovered slightly in after-hours trading, rising to $49-1/4.

Shares in Microsoft, which fell nearly 2.7 percent to $51-15/16, also rose slightly after-hours, to $52-3/8.

Microsoft had promised to have the latest development kits in developers' hands before the Electronic Entertainment Expo in mid-May, O'Rourke said.

''Our developer support and release process is also right on track," O'Rourke said.

''We're still on schedule. In fact, the last 12 of our hardware and software development kit releases were available on schedule," O'Rourke said.

The Xbox marks Microsoft's entry into the world of console gaming, and will be the largest product launch in the company's 26-year history.

It is trying to avoid the kind of delays that hampered the U.S. roll-out of Sony Corp.'s PlayStation 2 machine last holiday season, when only about half of the expected units made it to store shelves.

To ensure it has enough games to make the Xbox attractive to customers,

Microsoft has signed up 200 developers to create titles. It has also bought smaller game companies to beef up its own games publishing efforts.

Ashcroft Advises Video Game Caution

Attorney General John Ashcroft says video games depicting drugs and guns and excess media coverage of school shootings help condition kids to violence.

For the third time in two weeks, Ashcroft spoke out Wednesday about cultural influences, including violent entertainment, that lead kids to resort to violent behavior.

In a speech to newspaper editors, Ashcroft said the media needs to take responsibility for how it contributes to a "culture of violence," but he said he wasn't advocating narrowing First Amendment rights of free speech and expression. "If I were one to believe that the only solutions were governmental, I might be willing to trade First Amendment rights to improve the culture," said Ashcroft. "Frankly, I don't think trading First Amendment rights is a way to improve culture." Ashcroft said laws and government programs cannot stop the rash of school shootings across the country.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Napster, Music Industry Square Off in Senate Again

Music-industry executives told a Senate panel on Tuesday that viable Internet music services will be up and running soon, while popular on-line music swap business Napster said new laws were needed to make such systems viable.

The recording industry and Napster first aired their grievances before the Senate Judiciary Committee last July, when record companies and musicians said the free online music systems, such as Napster, threatened their business.

Napster is struggling to comply with an appeals-court ruling that said it must block unlicensed songs from its system. The company has struggled to convince major music groups to join a legitimate service it is developing with Bertelsmann.

Industry lobbyist Hilary Rosen sounded a conciliatory note when she addressed the panel on Tuesday, a day after music companies AOL Time Warner Inc., Bertelsmann AG and EMI Group Plc announced plans to build a subscription service with software company RealNetworks Inc. that they

expect will be available by late summer.

‘‘For me this hearing is not about piracy, it’s about opportunity," said Rosen, president of the Recording Industry Association of America.

Napster CEO Hank Barry, who last year told the committee that the issue would sort itself out in the marketplace, said Congress should establish a flat royalty rate for copyright holders.

‘‘The Internet needs a simple and comprehensive solution, similar to the one that allowed radio to succeed -- not another decade of litigation," Barry said.

Rocker Don Henley said compulsory licenses might be the best way to ensure that artists -- who he said have had no voice in the debate so far -- are fairly compensated.

‘‘There’s a ping-pong game going on across our heads" between the music industry and technology companies like Napster, Henley said.

Committee chairman Orrin Hatch, a Utah Republican and songwriter who has expressed concern for the rights of artists in the past, said perhaps Congress could rewrite the tax code to ensure that Internet subscription services treat all copyright holders fairly.

‘‘I’m wondering if there isn’t some way to put some incentive into the system so we wouldn’t have all these conflicts," Hatch said.

Napster Downloads Surge Despite File-Blocking

The hugely popular song-swapping service Napster saw traffic surge in the last week of March, even as the Internet site scrambled to block trade in copyrighted material, a study said on Wednesday.

The number of downloads on the Napster system spiked to 593 million songs in the last week of March, up more than 25 percent from the previous week, according to Webnoize, a Cambridge, Mass.-based company that follows online entertainment.

The evidence that consumers are downloading more songs through the restricted service comes amid continued skirmishing between Napster and the recording industry over whether the service has done enough to comply with the landmark court order that it stop trading copyrighted material.

‘‘Users are taking the file-blocking filter in their stride," Webnoize analyst Matt Bailey said. ‘‘Millions of users continue to use Napster to access huge amounts of free music."

The Recording Industry Association of America said in a late March filing with the U.S. District Court in San Francisco that it believed Napster was not complying with the March 5 injunction against it.

Napster responded by saying it had blocked more than 275,000 songs from being downloaded by the end of the month, but that the recording industry had not provided enough information to allow it to comply fully with the court order.

Napster said then that major recording companies had not provided it with variants of any song names, which would allow it to set up more efficient filters to block those copyright-protected tracks.

Napster users appear to have adjusted to the site’s filters in the past month by tweaking song titles without resorting to the more complicated translation sites that provide another loophole, said Bailey.

For example, ‘‘Fields of Gold," a recent Sting hit is blocked under its proper title but is still available under alternatives that users have learned to recognize such as "Field of Dreams," he said.

‘‘It’s still possible to get almost whatever you want on the Napster system," he said.

Neither Napster nor the RIAA were immediately available for comment on Wednesday.

On a monthly basis, Napster site traffic peaked in February when 2.79 billion songs were downloaded. That tally slipped to 2.49 billion in March, Webnoize said.

Has AOL IM Hit The Wall?

To many, it seemed the height of arrogance: In a bid to dominate the growing popularity of instant messaging nearly two years ago, America Online blocked communication between its subscribers and those using competing software.

Despite much criticism, the brazen strategy appeared to be working--until now. A little-publicized but startling study released last month showed that one of AOL’s chief rivals in this market, Microsoft’s MSN Messenger, tallied more subscribers worldwide.

Although the study was commissioned by Microsoft, thereby making it vulnerable to immediate challenge, its findings have raised questions about AOL’s controversial move to cut off the rest of the IM world. The decision may have backfired by effectively limiting the potential growth of AOL Instant Messenger (AIM) and by forcing the media giant into a protracted war with the powerful software company--just as AOL Time Warner faces other problems, ranging from merger integration to government regulation.

Adding insult to potential injury, the newly combined AOL Time Warner must mind its actions under court-appointed antitrust supervision even though its chief antagonist in instant messaging is a global empire that has become virtually synonymous with high-tech monopoly.

"You see a next-generation parallel to what Microsoft was trying to do in 1997 with the browser," said one AOL employee who requested anonymity. "From our perspective and the perspective of other folks who are looking at this very carefully right now, there is very much a return precisely to the scene of the crime that brought them to the judge’s chambers."

Unfortunately for AOL, the regulatory spotlight is trained on its own actions in instant messaging, not on that of its rivals. Aggravating the situation is Microsoft’s unabashed push into the market in recent months,

appropriately named "HailStorm," which would put MSN Messenger at the heart of all the software giant’s Web products.

AOL has made no public comment about how it plans to compete from its increasingly precarious position. But the media conglomerate maintains some powerful weapons in its arsenal, as long as it can employ them without overstepping any regulatory boundaries.

Through its Time Warner properties, AOL has acquired valuable advertising space in print outlets and air time on television. On the Web, the company has begun offering AIM through several Time Warner sites, including Time.com, People.com and Entertainment Weekly’s EW.com.

In addition, AOL has agreements with IBM, RealNetworks, Apple Computer, EarthLink, Juno Online Services and Novell to offer a co-branded version of AIM through their services. AIM also is going into mobile devices, such as cell phones using ATT TV, film and music content; and interactive TV.

In addition to AIM, AOL owns the second-largest instant messaging service: ICQ. Both services are available free; their value comes from the marketing and cross-promoting of other AOL products, or in the recruiting of new subscribers to the company’s online service.

None of this is lost on Microsoft, which has built its business through similar kinds of promotions for its products. That means it views instant messaging as a way to maintain control of the entire computing environment, not just as a tool for real-time text conversations punctuated by smiley-face icons.

"Browsers weren’t a big business, but they were strategic," said David Smith, an analyst at Gartner. For instant messaging, "there’s no dollars involved, but it’s important for other reasons," such as advertising, e-commerce and other complementary software.

IM proponents believe the technology will become as ubiquitous and convenient as the telephone.

Of particular importance is the technology’s ability to let people know when others are online--"presence," in industry vernacular. The detection in turn can help communications devices such as cell phones, handheld computers and telephones reach a desired party.

On the desktop, the software that provides IM services sits on top of a computer’s operating system. That is precisely what concerns Microsoft, which has ferociously guarded its Windows franchise.

"I think Microsoft is ultimately going to win the instant messaging wars," said Jeff Pulver, a telecom entrepreneur and organizer of the annual Presence & Instant Messaging conference. "Microsoft thinks strategic, while AOL thinks tactical."

Apple to Users: ’It’s Not Our Problem’

Apple Computer announced that memory vendors will have to fix a problem caused by an upgrade in Apple firmware released March 23rd which, in many cases after installation, cannot recognize the presence of third party memory.

Users, vendors and Mac gurus have been bothered, to say the least, as well as baffled, by the apparent nonchalance displayed by the Mac maker regarding the havoc caused by its 4.1.7 and 4.1.8 update.

The upgrade was intended to improve different aspects of FireWire disk operation, networking, password protection and system stability.

Systems affected by the firmware update include Power Mac G4 Cubes equipped with AGP graphics, Power Mac G4s and Macintosh Server G4 models equipped with AGP graphics, iMacs with slot-loading DVD or CD drives, PowerBooks, and iBooks with built-in FireWire.

"It has generated the biggest response so far this year. A lot of people have called ...It certainly wasn't well-handled," Ted Landau, editor of MacFixIt, a Web site that troubleshoots all things Macintosh, told NewsFactor Network. "Most people will get their RAM replaced [if they must], others will not do the upgrade."

As to Apple's response, Landau added, "They are not going to do anything. They consider it to be a problem of the RAM manufacturer ... If a RAM dealer has a problem, it doesn't mean they were selling inferior RAM, it means that their RAM didn't meet the changed specifications that Apple introduced with the firmware upgrade."

Apple's official statement, read to NewsFactor by company spokesperson Nathalie Welch, explains the enhancements of the upgrades, such as improved system performance and stability, but did not warn users of potential problems.

In its statement, Apple identifies the problem at hand but offers no solutions: "The new memory test disables memory DIMMs that are found to be out of specification and DIMMs that cannot be determined to be compatible. As a result, some third party memory that was recognized by previous versions of firmware may no longer be recognized after the updates," the company said.

"Apple cannot possibly test all the RAM out there," Welch told NewsFactor. "It is our hope that RAM vendors are manufacturing to specification. If Apple customers are having problems with RAM they have purchased, they should approach the RAM vendor for more information."

RAM vendors, meanwhile, are independently expressing concern about Apple's charges. Brian Sartorius, vice-president of Dallas, Texas-based Peripheral Enhancements, said: "The situation was first brought to our attention last week, and to date we have received no reports of failures due to our memory products."

Many RAM vendors are offering blanket guarantees or, according to Landau, claiming that they will reprogram RAM if the problems surface.

Peripheral Enhancements reassured its customers by confirming that it "...stand[s] behind all of our products with a lifetime warranty and unparalleled technical support and service."

One solution Landau presents to those seeking help is to run a program called DIMMCheck, reportedly created by New Zealander Glenn Anderson, which allows a user to check beforehand if the Mac's memory is compatible with the firmware upgrade or not.

At the very least, say Macophiles, Apple should have warned users of such a problem. However, the company appears to feel that the outcry has been misdirected, and stands by its upgrade.

"I think that all customers will appreciate that their systems will be more stable as an overall result," Welch explained to NewsFactor.

In the short term, Landau said, most users do not need the updates. However, Apple comes out with new firmware updates twice a year or so, according to Landau.

"Eventually, they'll come out with an upgrade that you want and you'll have to deal with [the problem]," he said.

eBay Eyes Opening Storefronts

Internet powerhouse eBay is gearing up to move beyond its auction listings base with an e-commerce hosting service, according to a report published Monday in an industry journal.

The new venture, which would be rolled out within several months, reportedly would allow businesses to set up branded fixed-priced storefronts on eBay's Web site.

With a storefront hosting service, eBay would be able to extend its reach to other e-commerce segments by keeping buyers and sellers from leaving its system while allowing vendors to offer their goods to customers outside the auction format.

Quoting an executive with knowledge of the auction giant's plans, the Interactive Week report said that eBay president and chief executive officer Meg Whitman has made the storefront project a "top priority" and is working aggressively to implement the service.

A spokesperson for the San Jose, California-based company, however, maintained that eBay is only evaluating whether to undertake a storefront offering and said there is no set timetable for a launch.

According to the report, the primary impetus behind eBay's storefront push is to even the playing field with e-tail heavyweight Amazon.com and portal giant Yahoo!, both of which have augmented their offerings by integrating auctions and hosting online stores for small and large businesses on their services.

Among Internet auction service companies, Auctionwatch and Andale have also recently begun tapping the storefront space.

Although pricing for eBay's service has not been set, the company is said to be examining models that include charging merchants a fixed fee for each transaction, a percentage of merchants' gross merchandise sales or a flat-rate monthly fee.

The storefront service is the latest indication that eBay is seeking to build upon its brand and make its technology a pervasive online force. Last month, eBay announced that it had formed a strategic alliance with Microsoft to jointly develop e-commerce applications and expand both companies' Web presence.

A central component of the deal calls for Microsoft to integrate eBay's online auction services into several of Microsoft's Internet properties, including the MSN network, the Carpoint online automotive site and WebTV. The companies also plan to integrate eBay's auction services into Microsoft's bCentral small business Web site, which would allow small businesses to market their goods and services to eBay customers.

Businesses that use bCentral will be able to post items for sale on eBay directly from bCentral and view eBay transaction histories from within bCentral.

Moreover, the companies said that the use of the Microsoft .NET platform will extend the eBay application program interface and make eBay's commerce engine accessible to developers around the world.

Americans Support Email Monitoring

A survey released Monday finds Americans are worried about criminal activity on the Internet and willing to let law enforcement agencies intercept suspects' email despite misgivings about privacy protections.

The survey by the Pew Internet & American Life Project found 73 percent of those surveyed were worried about criminals using the Internet to plan and carry out crimes, with 43 percent very concerned.

Child pornography topped the list of online criminal activity that most worried Americans, followed by credit card theft, terrorism, wide-scale fraud, hackers accessing government and business sites, and computer viruses.

Over half of the respondents, 54 percent, approved of the FBI or other law enforcement agencies intercepting email over the Internet sent to and from people suspected of criminal activities.

The FBI's e-mail wiretap system, formerly dubbed "Carnivore," has been criticized by privacy and civil-rights advocates, who say it violates protections against unreasonable search and seizure.

Americans familiar with Carnivore were divided on its merits, with 45 percent supporting the system and 45 percent saying the potential for abuse outweighed any crime-fighting benefits.

Sixty-two percent said new privacy laws were needed to protect online communications against unwarranted surveillance, while 14 percent said existing laws covering telephone conversations were adequate.

The survey of 2,096 adults was conducted between February 1 and March 1, and has a margin of error of 2 percentage points.

Privacy Concerns Force Bush To Abandon E-Mail

Shortly after his inauguration, President George W. Bush said he stopped sending e-mail to relatives because he feared a loss of privacy. Now, he

says, that policy has widened to include his friends.

Bush regularly exchanged e-mail as a way of keeping in touch, but stopped after the election last November, he told a meeting of the Society of Newspaper Editors.

"I used to be an avid e-mailer, and I e-mailed to my daughters or e-mailed to my father, for example, and I don't want those e-mails to be in the public domain," he said.

Bush has discovered what many Internet users already knew -- e-mail is convenient but it can also be subject to monitoring, even if the user is not a public official and the correspondence is not subject to public domain laws.

"E-mail is very permanent," policy analyst Andrew Shen of the Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC) told NewsFactor Network. "The executive office is not covered by the 1974 Federal Privacy Act."

Bush's brother, Florida governor Jeb Bush, regularly spends more than two hours daily answering e-mail on his laptop computer. His affinity for electronic communications is so strong, in fact, that the Florida press has dubbed him "Governor E-mail."

Elizabeth Hirst, the governor's press secretary, confirmed to NewsFactor that the Bush brothers used to exchange e-mail messages daily. After the presidential election last November, however, Jeb and the president switched to talking on the telephone.

While the president's problem is somewhat unique, it differs little from the lack of privacy that other Internet users face daily.

A number of bills addressing privacy issues are currently in the U.S. Congress, and EPIC's Shen said he is hopeful that a privacy Bill of Rights for the Internet will emerge from this session.

A prime example of how misguided e-mail can come back to haunt the sender appeared this week, when shares of a health care industry software developer dropped some 22 percent after its boss tried to fire up the troops in a stinging e-mail.

Neal Patterson, chief executive officer of Cerner Corporation, sent an e-mail on March 13th telling company managers they had two weeks to shape up.

Because he felt the staff had been slacking off, Patterson wrote that "hell will freeze over" before he would increase employee benefits, adding that he wanted to see the company's parking lot nearly full by 7:30 a.m. and half-full on weekends.

"You have two weeks. Tick, tock," his e-mail ended.

The e-mail appeared on a Yahoo! message board two weeks later, and analysts that follow the company began getting calls from anxious shareholders. The stock price then tumbled.

Patterson subsequently apologized in another e-mail, asking that it not be shared with the public. Of course, it was.

"Sadly, there is a tendency to overuse e-mail," said Ralph Biggadike,

professor at the Columbia University Graduate School of Business. "E-mail should not be used for a problem-solving discussion. E-mail does not really promote dialogue."

Biggadike told NewsFactor that executives should be extremely careful when using e-mail as it can easily be forwarded to others, including competitors, "and they will last forever."

eBay: ’Private’ Data May Not Stay That Way

EBay Inc, the popular online auction service that is one of the most visited sites on the Web, has advised its customers that the personal data they divulge may not be as secure as they thought.

In a revised privacy policy posted on the company’s site, eBay said that if it were to merge or be acquired by another company, ‘‘you should expect that eBay would share some or all of your information."

The company, which regularly collects names and addresses from new users and is also able to track their surfing patterns within its vast auction network, says it does not sell the data it collects but does share it with its subsidiaries and joint ventures.

EBay was not immediately available to discuss why the privacy policy had been updated, or whether the new reference to a possible merger meant that the company was in talks with partners.

But in the new statement it posted, it stressed that consumers should be mindful that privacy policies are ever subject to change, and that even secure data may sometimes be compromised.

The company said that ‘‘future developments may force us to make more changes" to the privacy policy. And, in a later warning it noted that ‘‘we cannot ensure that all of your private communications and other personally identifiable information will never be disclosed in ways not otherwise described in this privacy policy."

‘‘We may be forced to disclose information to the government or third parties under certain circumstances, third parties may unlawfully intercept or access transmissions or private communications, or users may abuse misuse your information that they collect from our site," it said in the statement.

Microsoft’s Virus Antidote: Ban Attachments

Is Microsoft making the cure worse than the sickness?

Responding to the rash of e-mail viruses that started with Melissa and I Love You, the Redmond, Wash.-based company is clamping down on the types of file attachments that will work with the newest version of its Outlook e-mail software.

Outlook 2002, a new e-mail application included with Microsoft’s forthcoming Office XP business software suite due later this spring, will

by default reject more than 30 types of files sent as e-mail attachments, according to company executives.

The files, deemed by Microsoft as most likely to be used by hackers to transfer viruses, include some of the most common types, such as program execution files, batch files, Windows help files, and Java and Visual Basic scripting files. Also blocked are photo CD images, screensavers and HTML application files, according to a list supplied by Microsoft.

Opponents to the plan say Microsoft will make it much more difficult to share routine--and harmless--information via e-mail attachments.

Outlook 2002 doesn’t block e-mail messages with appended restricted files, but it will refuse to open or download restricted file types. In a test conducted by CNET News.com, Outlook 2002 rejected an .exe file, Palm.exe, sent as an attachment to an e-mail message. An e-mail message displayed on the e-mail recipient’s PC read: "Outlook blocked access to the following potentially unsafe attachments: palm.exe."

Outlook 2002 users can send the restricted files as attachments, but the program will display the message: "Recipients using Microsoft Outlook may not be able to open these attachments."

Microsoft’s crackdown on e-mail attachments is not new. After the I Love You virus outbreak, the company posted an Outlook 97 and Outlook 2000 security update that restricted access to some e-mail attachments. Late last year, Microsoft also added the security update to the second Office 2000 service pack, which included a collection of bug fixes.

But in both cases, individuals and companies could chose whether to apply the restrictive update. With Outlook 2002, Microsoft will compel everyone to adopt the new security measure. The company also makes it nearly impossible for individuals and very difficult for corporations to disable the feature, which the company says is necessitated by the threat the attachments pose.

"We felt that in order to provide a level of protection many of our customers were asking for--as well as make sure that people became aware of good e-mail protocols--we needed to take a bit of a harsher step," said Lisa Gurry, Office XP product manager.

But in taking that "harsher step," Microsoft also made the feature difficult to turn off, offering the average user no simple or direct means of disabling the function.

Gurry said that with so few people downloading the updates, "unless we build something into the product, it’s likely not going to protect them."

For companies offering tech support or for software developers--two groups that routinely send e-mail files Outlook 2002 won’t accept--their jobs could get a lot harder. For everyone else, Microsoft insists e-mail will be safer to use.

But some people question Microsoft’s approach of blocking file access from e-mail, arguing the company is not dealing with the real problem, which is how certain file types affect both Outlook and Windows.

Matt Bishop, a computer sciences professor with the University California at Davis, described Microsoft’s solution as "a step in the right direction." But Jay Goodwin, an Office user from Irvine, Calif., isn’t so

sure.

"I do suspect this is a Band-Aid to a much larger problem Microsoft seems to have with regards to the security of their products," Goodwin said. "As a friend of mine commented recently, ’I think this hoof-and-mouth disease is the only virus that doesn’t affect Outlook.’"

The problem has more to do with Windows than with Outlook, said Bill Jaeger, applied research director for MetaSes, an Atlanta-based security services firm and Meta Group affiliate.

"This is most certainly a Band-Aid for the greater security problems inherent in Windows," he said. "The appropriate solution is for Windows to not blindly run any content that looks like an executable."

Many Microsoft competitors do not take such a heavy-handed approach. Qualcomm’s Eudora, for example, does not restrict file attachments the way Outlook 2002 will.

Scott Shuchart, a Eudora user from New Haven, Conn., believes "naive users probably need all the protection they can get. I really am all for limiting .exe forwarding so long as it doesn’t break the product (more) for the clueful." That, he added, is what Microsoft appears to be doing with Outlook, which he described as "a hideous monstrosity."

The financial damage caused by viruses such as I Love You and Melissa warrants taking such aggressive action, even at the cost of the user’s choice, Gurry said.

The original I Love You virus, which appeared in many mutations, infected more than 600,000 computers and caused more than $2.5 billion in damages.

Companies with Outlook attached to a server running Microsoft Exchange would have some ability to adjust the default security settings, Gurry said. But she would not go into detail about how that might be done.

"For businesses or small businesses that don’t have that server option, we’re providing an additional option with Office XP you can choose to turn off the attachment support," Gurry said. "But that’s something we don’t recommend that people do."

In fact, Microsoft makes turning off the feature downright difficult. Office XP users must physically edit the Windows Registry--an internal database of Windows information--to turn off the attachment restriction function. Microsoft makes it fairly easy to adjust other security features in its products; for example, an easily accessible control can be used to adjust how Internet Explorer responds to potentially dangerous Web content.

Microsoft won’t provide instructions on how to tweak the registry "until Office XP is broadly available," Gurry said. Office XP is due to reach store shelves May 31.

Security expert Richard Smith, who had a hand in uncovering the Melissa virus’ origins, believes Microsoft is taking tough action where it is warranted.

"I’m very supportive of it," he said. "I think it’s socially unacceptable to send executables around, even legitimate ones. This kind of enforces that rule, and we’ll kind of have to get used to it."

Smith sees a simple solution for people absolutely needing to send executable file attachments: Compress the file using popular utilities like WinZip.

"Us programmers are going to have to get used to zipping things up first," he said. "It's called changing social behavior."

But Jaeger, in some ways, sees Microsoft's solution as dangerous.

"This doesn't solve the greater problem and simply leads to a false sense of security," he said. "It's time for Microsoft to start curing the problem, not treating the symptoms."

Bishop said he expects some controversy over Microsoft's handling of the matter but doubts there will ever be a consensus on the approach.

"I don't think you'll be able to get people to agree on whether it's too little or too much," he said.

New Pentium 4 Coming Amid Price Cuts

Intel will release a 1.7GHz Pentium 4 processor in a little over two weeks into a market that is awash in price cuts and discounts.

The 1.7GHz Pentium 4, which will officially debut on April 23, will appear in PCs from Dell Computer, among others, said sources. Additionally, the Santa Clara, Calif.-based chipmaker will release on Monday an 850MHz version of its budget Celeron processor.

The new Pentium 4 will likely invigorate the debate between processor aficionados over which company--Intel or Advanced Micro Devices--currently rules the performance roost.

AMD's fastest Athlon chip tops out at 1.3GHz, giving Intel a substantial margin in speed, a gap that will continue in the third quarter when Intel comes out with a 2GHz Pentium 4 and AMD releases 1.5GHz and 1.7GHz Athlons.

While more speed boosts sales, it is only one measure of performance, and on many standard applications, Athlon outpaces the Pentium 4. The Pentium 4, however, does better on video compression and many multimedia applications.

"On certain things like streaming media, the Pentium 4 does extremely well. On the standard benchmarks, the Athlon does extremely well," said MicroDesign Resources analyst Kevin Krewell.

"I'm leaning more toward the Intel model as time goes on," Krewell added. With applications such as Microsoft's PowerPoint presentation program, "we're getting to the point where the (1GHz) processor can do it all."

But, just as important, consumers are also seeing benefits at the cash register. A slowdown in the PC industry has lead to a constant stream of price cuts and new bargains.

Intel and AMD are slated to officially cut prices by 20 percent or more on

April 15 and 16, respectively, according to several sources. Those coming price cuts, however, are already in effect at many retailers.

The 1.5GHz Pentium 4, for instance, sells for $637 each in wholesale quantities of 1,000, while the 1.4GHz version goes for $423. Usually, Intel’s wholesale prices are lower than retail prices, but that’s not always the case now.

Dallas Memory International currently sells the 1.5GHz for $500, while the same chip with a fan, a heat sink and 128MB of Rambus memory sells for $657. A 1.4GHz Pentium 4 goes for $370 while the fancy bundle goes for $450. All chips are in stock, according to a sales representative.

On the AMD side, the 1.3GHz Athlon "officially" sells for $318 while the 1.2GHz version sells for $268 in wholesale quantities of 1,000. Distributors, though, are selling the 1.3GHz chip for $223 and the 1.2GHz for $201.

The early discounts come partly as a way to clear inventory. Distributors and dealers are cutting prices now in anticipation of the mid-month discounts. Additionally, the "gray market" or unauthorized dealer network, has been increasingly active.

When computer makers and distributors find themselves holding excess inventories of components, these companies will sell the parts to overseas wholesalers and other parties at a discount. Subsequently, these parts return to North America and sell for less than the parts coming out of the factory. Authorized dealers then have to cut prices further.

In slow periods, however, gray market activity increases. The result is that unauthorized dealers now are selling the 1.3GHz Athlons in the $180 range. Authorized retailer Lynn Computer Products, by comparison, sells the chip for $249.

"The gray market is a much larger problem these days," said Rob Guella, president of RB Computing, and authorized AMD dealer in Nepean, Ontario. "When there are a lot of CPUs on the market, that concerns AMD. Price cuts will depend on how much gray market activity they find."

Added Doug Lynn of Lynn Computer: "It’s been hard to compete lately against the gray market."

AMD, in fact, is already offering its April 16 price through select distributors in an effort to combat gray marketing. The Sunnyvale, Calif.-based manufacturer also often sells its chips at a negotiated discount.

The megahertz gap is also hurting AMD, added Krewell. Although its 1.3GHz chips rival the 1.5GHz Pentium 4 in many respects, it has to price them against the 1.3GHz Pentium 4.

"AMD is being forced into a frequency match-up, which is beneficial to Intel," he said. "AMD is stuck with pricing based on megahertz."

Intel declined to comment on upcoming products or price cuts, while AMD representatives could not be reached for comment.

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